

February 13, 2020

To: House Committee on Education; Chairman Huebert and Members of the Committee

Written testimony submitted in opposition of House Bill 2601

Dear members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of truth and best practices in this matter. The majority of Kansas children are vaccinated and the majority of Kansas citizens understand the need for school vaccine requirements. Kansans stand together on this important topic with medical experts, scientists, immunologists, infectious disease specialist, public health officials, epidemiologist, school authorities and many other highly educated, thoughtful, caring people who work every day to help each other do what is best for our communities.

My son's elementary school welcomed back a student who battled cancer this year. The principal reached out to all families to explain the importance of keeping all students safe. This means for our student who is in a vulnerable population with a weakened immune system the rest of the students need to be fully vaccinated. This helps create an environment of protection and safety. Any families who have questions about this are encouraged to talk to their doctors or ask for help.

Our children depend on us to keep the structure and function of the role of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) Secretary. This most efficiently and effectively serves their preventive health needs against infectious disease. Our current organization and method for addressing vaccines is in line with best practices used in most all of the United States. This gives us the ability to follow recommendations from the Advisory Council on Immunization Practices (ACIP) who meet regularly throughout the year.

We have the luxury of this discussion now because we all have benefited from the undeniable success of vaccines in our society. Unfortunately we don't need to look far to see what highly contagious, dangerous infectious can do.

Kansas had several schools shut down so far this flu season due to overwhelming illness burden and public safety concerns. Healthy Kansas children have died from influenza this season. This is not a situation we want to work towards escalating with other preventable infectious disease. Our current system allows timely and evidence-based interventions from the ACIP through our KDHE. As new threats emerge, we need this current administrative process to be in place to protect our school children.

Today, there is worldwide concern for the Coronavirus and we can watch it sicken and kill people across the world. Americans are stuck in mandatory quarantine due to these conditions. In this situation individual freedom has been lost because the authorities must work to keep the public safe from an epidemic. This is an extreme but very real situation that cannot be denied. Prevention is always the best strategy and public health experts rely on leadership support so they can make decisions that keep us all healthy.

I am aware that you are receiving frequent, unfocused communication from a small but vocal group who unfortunately continue to misunderstand vaccines and the obligation leadership has for public health. I encourage anyone who has questions about their own health or that of their families to talk to a medical

expert who can help them individually. But this group is not interested in learning or helping, they want disruption and distraction. Using misinterpreted information to try and scare people is a dangerous and reckless strategy that could result in very bad outcomes for the school children in our state.

KDHE has proven to respond quickly in the past when we had Kansans with measles. These professionals in charge of infectious disease prevention need to be able to immediately intervene if or when something happens. The nature of the legislative system does not allow for this type of swift action and this is another important reason why decisions about vaccines should not be moved away from KDHE.

Thank you for all you do for Kansas and your thoughtful consideration of this important public health matter that most directly affects our bright and hopeful future – our children! Reject House Bill 2601.

Gretchen Homan M.D. F.A.A.P.